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The Simpler Side of Buddhist Doctrine

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The Simpler Side of Buddhist Doctrine

W

HEN Prince Siddhattha, over 2500 years ago, finally achieved his quest and, under the Bodhi Tree at Buddhgayā, gained full enlightenment, becoming a Sammā Sambuddha, his first thought was that so high an attainment as this would be beyond the capacity of mankind, and that any attempt to teach others would only involve him in weariness of body. At the Temple of Rammaka the Brahmin, speaking to the Bhikkhus, he said [1] :

“The thought came to me, O Bhikkhus: “This doctrine to which I have attained is profound, hard to understand, difficult to explain, rare, precious, not to be reached by mere reasoning, subtle, to be grasped only by the wise.

But mankind is seized, entranced, spell-bound by its greeds. Thus seized, entranced, spellbound by its greeds, this race of men will find it hard to understand the arising of all things through causes, and in dependence upon causes. And it is also difficult for them to understand how all the constituents of being

can be made to subside—the doing away of all the bases of being, the quenching of craving, dispassion, cessation, Nibbāna. And now, should I teach this doctrine and others fail to understand, it would only result in trouble and weariness for me,”

But looking over the world with the eye of a Buddha, the Exalted One saw that “Just as in a pond where lotuses are growing, blue, red and white, some of the plants, which have sprung up and grown in the water, do not reach the surface but grow under the water, while some reach the surface of the water, and others yet, standing clear of the water, are not touched by it, so, looking over the world with the eye of Enlightenment, I perceived beings of all kinds, lightly stained and deeply stained, intelligent and dull, good and bad, keen-witted and stupid, and some also who saw the terrors of the afterworld and the results of ill deeds.”

So the Buddha decided to teach the doctrine, and breathed forth the words, “Open are the doors of the Deathless to those who have ears: let them repose trust.”

It is a common aspiration among Buddhists today to desire rebirth, as men, in the lifetime of the next Buddha, Metteyya; and there were large numbers of men and women who, making such aspiration in ages

past, and working strenuously to deserve it, were reborn during the lifetime of the Buddha Gotama. Those were the lotus buds, unstained by the water, and standing clear of it, who waited but for the rising sun to open their petals in the glory of full bloom. Those were the first to “repose trust”, listen to the Master and pass through “the doors of the Deathless”, and there were thousands of Arahants in the world.

But what of the great mass of humanity, those lotuses not yet ready for the dawn of the morrow’s sun, those whose promise of bloom was even yet embedded deep in the mud of saṃsāra’s slime? It is for such as these that the Arahants of the First Great Convocation, immediately after the Master’s final passing away, patiently rehearsed the whole of the Dhamma, thereafter known as the Tipiṭaka which, till today, has been so carefully treasured in this Sri Lanka, in Ceylon.

The goal, achieved by the Arahants of the Master’s lifetime, and for hundreds of years since, may not be immediately within our reach today. But in this vast collection of teaching, our greatest heritage, there abound poems and parables, compassionate advice and direct simple appeal such as would touch any heart open to truth’s simple message.

It is this that has brought countless millions to the

feet of the Peerless One throughout all these centuries, and even today, more than 2500 years after that Dhamma was first revealed, yet commands the allegiance of a third of humanity. It is the simpler side of this Dhamma, the unchanging eternal law, whether Buddhas appear or not,—well declared by the Blessed One, difficult to grasp even by the wise but not beyond the understanding and appreciation of the meanest intellect, that the majority of Buddhists follows today.

“Strong limbs may dare the rugged road
which storms,
Soaring and perilous, the mountain’s breast ;
The weak must wind from lower ledge to
ledge,
With many a place of rest.

“So is the Eightfold Path which brings to
peace;
By lower or by upper heights it goes.
The firm soul hastes, the feeble tarries.
All will reach the sunlit snows.” [2]

There are many Suttas in our books wherein the Dhammassāmi, the Lord of Truth, outlines the qualities to be acquired by the humble follower who would strive to lead a good life. But one chooses here an incident, recorded in the Aṅguttara, [3] that is a

very poem of joy and domestic felicity.

The Blessed One was dwelling in the Deer-park near Suṃsumāragira, and he visited his followers, “the parents of Nakula”. It is curious that nowhere are these delightful people mentioned by their own names: the commentary gives no help andwidth, perforce, only as “parents of Nakula” may we know them. Both came to where the Teacher was seated, made obeisance to the Exalted One, and Nakulapitā spoke thus:

“Bhante, ever since Nakulamātā as a girl, was brought home to me, a youth, never have I known any transgression on her part, even in thought, much less in deed. We wish, Bhante, in this life to rejoice with each other, and also to rejoice with each other in the next world.”

Then Nakulamātā spoke thus:

“Bhante, ever since I, as a girl, was taken home to Nakulapitā, a youth, never have I known any transgression on his part, even in thought, much less in deed. We wish, Bhante, in this life to rejoice with each other, and also to rejoice with each other in the next world.” And, to these two, the Teacher speaks:

“If, householders, both wife and husband should plan to rejoice with each other in this life and also in the next,—then indeed should both be equally

saddhāvanta (have trustful confidence in the Triple Gem), equally virtuous, equally generous, and equally wise. Then, truly, will they rejoice with each other not only in this life but also in the next.”

Here then is a teaching all can easily grasp—simple and straight-forward. Sow together, and similarly, and you will reap together. If the sowing be of a high order, the reaping will also be of a high order.

As long as human nature remains what it is, men and women will marry; and marriage should be the closest companionship possible. No two others may aid or mar each other’s progress in the sea of life as a married couple may. They can be beneficent friends (*kalyāṇa-mittā*); and, of such friendship, when once [4] the Thera Ānanda asked the Master, “Is it not a half of the holy life?” the Buddha replied: “Not so Ānanda! Not so. Beneficent friendship is the whole of the holy life.”

The Exalted One himself is, naturally, the best “beneficent friend” a being may obtain, and next to him, in due order, come his disciples. But in the ideal marriage that everybody desires, the ordinary average man can visualise a happy couple, beneficent friends to each other, and aiding each other’s progress not only in this life, but in life after life to come till, at last, each aids the other to the summum bonum of

deliverance from all suffering.

In the Holy Books are many sermons, long and short, full of advice to the average layman. Notable amongst these is the Sigālovāda Suttanta, known as “the Layman’s Vinaya” which details correct behaviour for the good layman. Excellent though all such sermons are, none can surpass the brief simple appeal of the words to Nakula’s parents, which advise the cultivation of four things: Saddhā, Virtue, Generosity and Wisdom.

1. SADDHĀ

...is a difficult word to translate. It connotes so much more than “faith,” which is the usual English rendering that it is best left untranslated. The simplest form of Saddhā is that which is seen in a child reverencing the Blessed One through his symbols the relic-enshrining Dagaba, the Bo-tree that sheltered him when he became a Buddha, and the image that tries to picture him to our eyes. The child’s Saddhā in the Triple Gem of Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, is due to its trust in its parents who thus far have guided it safely. It approximates the average man’s “faith” in such matters as the North Pole, the electron and quantum theory, none of which he is likely to prove

for himself in this life. The Saddhā of the adult Buddhist is on a higher plane. It is the essential characteristic of Buddhist devotion, so conspicuous in the crowds that adoringly move from shrine to shrine in any Buddhist land on a Vesak full-moon day. Strangers, visiting Sri Lanka, may be surprised at the sight of this devotion, so like the attitude of the worshipping theist, in adherents of Buddha-dhamma, which acknowledges no “creator,” and demands cold reasoning and keen investigation.

What then is the meaning of this intense devotion, this earnest adoration? It is evidence of true Buddhist Saddhā. Can we analyse this Saddhā? Yes; and a powerful element in it is grateful love. It is this love that makes Saddhā so sublime; it is utterly selfless; it expects nothing in return, for the Peerless One has “gone beyond” and can no longer aid any cosmic being personally again. In this devotion there is naught of the fear that may move a theist, no supplication. There is only love, selfless grateful love.

This love is the main moving element of Saddhā, but its essential element is trust that becomes more and more confident as the devotee progresses in study, practice and realisation, till, at last, it becomes the supreme unshakable assurance of one who knows, the Arahant.

Both these factors, the Dhamma tells us, are worth cultivating.

Their driving power is supreme. There is nothing to equal this unique thing, Buddhist Saddhā. It is the spark that, tended with care, will one day burn up all impurity. And it is directed towards a man and his teaching, not towards a god. A man, who was once a man like ourselves, but whose heart blazed with a compassion, for all that suffer, such as we puny ones can scarce conceive. It was such a compassion as drove him on, sacrificing all that men hold dear, sacrificing life itself, time and again, so that he may, some day, snatch from life the solution of this riddle of an endless chain of deaths and suffering. Perfecting himself, life after life for countless aeons, he at last succeeded in his search. Under the Bodhi Tree at Uruvelā he sat, in that last struggle, with steeled determination,—“Let my flesh and blood dry up, my skin, ligaments and very bones, but from this seat I rise not till Perfect Enlightenment is attained!”

He won, and, in winning that last fight, Prince Siddhattha became a Buddha, a fully enlightened one, an omniscient and incomparable one.

On that very Vesak Full-moon night, attaining the deepest ‘one-pointedness’ of mind, the Prince acquired in succession: “memory of past existences”,

“divine sight”—by which he saw beings dying and being reborn again—and knowledge of the “Wheel of Life”—the chain of causes and effects that makes up existence. “Then, O Bhikkhus”, said he, “Myself subject to birth, growth and decay, disease, death, sorrow and stain, but perceiving the wretchedness of things subject to birth, growth and decay, disease, death, sorrow and stain, and seeking after the incomparable security of Nibbāna the birthless, the free from growth and decay, the free from disease, the deathless, sorrowless and stainless—to that incomparable security I attained—even to Nibbāna the birthless, the free from growth and decay, the free from disease, the deathless, sorrowless and stainless.

Then I saw and knew—‘Assured am I of deliverance, this is my final birth, never more shall I return hither!’ [5]

For 45 years thereafter the Peerless One—compassionate, tireless, and patient—taught all who have ears and would repose Saddhā, and his last words were:

“Look now, O Bhikkhus, I urge you: Transient innately are all compounds ; With zeal work out your aim.” [6]

And we, ordinary average followers of that flower of humanity bow down at his shrines today, in that

specially Buddhist form of devotion, Saddhā, which is not faith indeed, so far as faith is blind, unreasoning, and based on no principle or fact in life. Saddhā, is rather the maturer love and confidence, the true heart's adoration that comes in the train of understanding, when we have gained a little of self-mastery and begin to understand the value of self-sacrifice; when we begin to gain some glimpse of the meaning of that infinite love that has for us resulted in some slight knowledge of the law, our treasure.

So we heap piles of scented flowers, offer incense and lights before our teacher's shrine, and preface all our acts of worship and meditation with the well-known formula:—

Namo Tassa Bhagavato. Arahato, Sammā-Sambuddhassa!

“Glory unto Him, the Exalted Lord, the Holy One, the Utterly Awakened!”

So long as the self looms great in each of us, it seems derogatory to its vanity that one should kneel in adoration of any being, though he be the greatest on this our Earth or in the heavens beyond; it appears of little value that another should have given all his life, all of many lives, for the sake of helping life at large to find security. But as we learn to understand that

craving desires, the cause of all our sufferings, spring from this same thought of self, and how difficult each poor act of self-renunciation is, we begin to see the value of our teacher's long quest. Setting our puny efforts beside our knowledge of the sacrifice which this discovery of the eternal law involved for one, the greatest and most perfect of men, we turn with shame from the thought of our paltry efforts, so mean do they appear.

Thus we see our true place, as compared with the heights of selflessness and attainment won by the holy and exalted. Our hearts are filled with wonder and love as we chant the ancient, beautiful Pali Hymn:

The Buddhas of the ages past,
The Buddhas that are yet to come,
The Buddhas of the present age,
Lowly, I each day, adore!

No other refuge do I seek,
Buddha is my matchless refuge:
By might of truth in these my words,
May joyous victory be mine!

This then is Saddhā—a devotion, a love and a confidence that helps us onward. Without it, we can never win the fire, the power and earnestness that alone can forward our high aim. As the mists of “self”

roll aside, bright and brighter yet glows the Buddha-Beacon. "Once has one achieved, and still, on Earth, his glory shines over the dark floods of life's ocean, marking the path that each must cross to win the peace." By understanding the doctrine he revealed, we may surely guide our barque straight to that other shore, but the motive power, to drive our ships, is born from Saddhā. Therefore, it is not children alone who need to kneel before the master's shrine and offer lowly gifts of light, flower and scent. We all need it, for the mental power it alone can yield—for none of us has finally escaped the fangs of self, and Saddhā is the antidote to its poison.

We too need the act of homage though its adoration is directed, not to a person—for in truth all personality is a dream—but to our hearts' ideal. Thus may we ever find fresh strength and build a shrine of our own lives, cleansing our hearts till they are worthy to bear that image in an innermost sanctuary of love. Upon that altar all of us need to offer gifts daily, gifts, not of dying lights, fading flowers and evanescent scents, but of deeds of love, of sacrifice, and selflessness towards those about us.

These should be the Buddhist's daily offering in worship of the Perfect One. Striving to be his followers not merely in name alone, but in our hearts and lives proving that our Ideal has yet the power to call us and

to guide.

And the cleansing power of *saddhā* will surely lead us upward, and towards our goal. For this we have the master's own assurance. In a sermon preached at the Jetavana Monastery, in Sāvatti, known as 'The Parable of the Snake', [7] an extremely instructive discourse to the Bhikkhus, after assuring the Saints of the Four Grades of the absolute certainty of their deliverance, the Lord of Truth continues:

"Thus, O Bhikkhus, the Dhamma has been well taught by me, made known, revealed, elucidated, free from shoddiness. And, O Bhikkhus, in the Dhamma thus well taught by me, made known, revealed, elucidated, free from shoddiness—whatsoever Bhikkhus conform to the Dhamma, follow with Saddha, all these are destined to full awakening." It is true that the commentary, referring to this section, says: "The Theras of yore termed such Bhikkhus 'Baby Sotāpannas"—possibly alluding to those who have reached the seventh and last "purity's" dawn, yogis of high attainment, but not yet "Ariya"—who also are termed "Cūla Sotāpanna". But I prefer the Commentator's earlier description of these Bhikkhus as "Discerning people, who see there is no other Ariya Dhamma."

But that is not the end of the Sutta; for, our teacher

concludes—and one cannot help but quote the very words of the All-seeing, so heartening are they:

“And, O Bhikkhus, in the Dhamma thus well taught by me, made known, revealed, elucidated, free from shoddiness, whosoever turn to me merely with trust and love—all these are destined to heavens.” So spoke the Blessed One. After such a clear and cheering assurance as this, there is no need to stress the value of saddhā to each and every ordinary average laywoman and man.

2. VIRTUE—

The next thing to cultivate is Virtue (*sīla*).

A striking thing in the Buddha-dhamma is that here we find naught of “Thou shalt” or “Thou shalt not”. When once it is realised that selfishness and self-indulgence cause all our woe, then a wise one strives for self mastery. *Sīla* is the mastery of speech and action. Of his own free will, the Buddhist “pledges to observe” this precept of virtue, and that. The minimum number of such precepts of virtue that the good Buddhist should observe is five: (1) I undertake to observe the precept to abstain from destroying the life of beings; (2) from taking things not given; (3) from sexual misconduct; (4) from false speech, and (5)

from liquor that causes intoxication and heedlessness.

On holy days, the earnest Buddhist observes eight precepts. In this list, instead of undertaking to abstain from only sexual misconduct, one substitutes 'all unchastity'. And the added three precepts pledge to abstain from taking food between midday and the next day's dawn; from dancing, singing, music, unseemly shows, the use of garlands, perfumes, beauty creams, and things intended to beautify and adorn; and lastly, from using grandiose and luxurious beds and seats.

All these precepts, from the layman's minimum five to the Bhikkhu's numerous observances of virtue, are intended to purify speech and deed, to aid self-restraint and self-mastery. Non-Buddhists, at times, find fault with these precepts of virtue, calling them "negative". This is due partly to ignorance of Buddhist ideals, and partly to an innate selfish tendency to interfere in other beings' affairs which is a very common trait, both in individuals and nations. Great nations like to take up weak nations' burdens—at a reasonable profit. The ideal of plain living and high thinking is gradually becoming obsolete. The new model is to 'improve the standard of living', a slogan of individuals and nations who have much to sell and want others to buy. The fashionable tailor would like even a Bhikkhu to clothe himself stylishly. If the

majority of us adopted Eastern dress, it would be a bleak outlook for the fashionable tailor. It is not universal love that prompts us to help a lame dog over a stile. We are not eager to aid a maimed snake or centipede over anything, except perhaps a passage into the next world. The dog protects us and our possessions, and yet, when our self interest demands it, we deliver even the dog to the vivisectionist.

The Buddhist wants to dominate his senses. Every one of the five senses clamours to be fed with what it likes—the eye clamours for beautiful sights, the ear for sweet music, the nose for pleasing odours, the tongue for delightful food and drink, the body for sensuous and even sensual contacts. Long have the senses done this, and long have they been pampered, till their insistence has become dominant and arrogant. And what, like an overworked tired servant, must serve these five lordly senses? It is mind. Mind, the true king, has been deposed, and mind's servants, the five senses, have usurped its place. The Buddhist would restore to mind its sovereignty. For mind is the sole weapon wherewith we may carve our way. The worldling's mind is exhausted by its labours, devising ways and means to serve the usurping senses. It has no breathing space to see things as they really are, because, forsooth, the taste sense may even addle it moreover, and blunt its keenness, with intoxicating

drinks.

Sīla begins to remedy all this, and helps mind to study other things and to understand. The more one understands, the more one realises the value of this *sīla* discipline. “As hand washes hand, and foot washes foot,—so right conduct aids right understanding, and right understanding aids right conduct.”

With regard to the Buddhist precepts being “only negative virtues”—although one is tempted to ask what the positive aspect is of some of them, it is well to state here that Buddhist psychology does not share that view. Although the dominant “volitional” factor in each thought moment of determination to refrain from killing is the factor of “abstinence”, a number of other factors, powerful amongst them being the positive factors of liberality, selfless love, and compassion, crowd around that leading factor of abstinence, making it easy for the strict observer of the first precept to practise the positive Buddhist meditations on universal compassion and universal love. So it is with each precept. Sīla, moreover, is not the whole tale of Buddhist effort at perfection. Every Buddhist must strive to perfect ten “highest states” (Pāramī). Without perfection in these, he cannot hope to “enter the stream” of Pāramī, of alms-giving, energetic activity, truthfulness, resolution and love, to

such an extent of awe-inspiring completeness as would make the hair of even the most ardent admirer of “positive virtue” stand on end. How would such an one, for instance like to “give alms” of his own body to a starving tigress? How far will he succeed in extending love towards a man who is lopping off his limbs the while he himself is bleeding to death? One who knows, knows that Buddhist doctrine inculcates the practice of the highest positive virtues to the highest extent possible.

And again, will the admirer of “positive virtues” prefer to live with murderers, thieves, lechers, liars and drunkards as his neighbours, or with Buddhists who abstain from all these things? He will naturally prefer the Buddhists. Why? Because with the Buddhists he will never have cause for fear. In other words, the virtuous Buddhist gives him Abhaya Dāna, the positive virtue of the gift of freedom from fear. And virtuous Buddhists, wherever they live, are constantly and freely giving Abhaya Dana to all around them.

To a Buddhist, “Contentment is the greatest wealth”. He aims at reducing his needs, not multiplying them; at controlling his senses, not indulging them. The five senses have combined to soil the lamp of mind to such an extent that, ordinarily, its light is dim and murky and things cannot be seen as

they really are. *Sīla* is designed to cleanse that lamp, to purify the fouled oil, to renew the clogged wick, and wipe away the soot and dirt on the chimney, so that the lamp may glow brightly and throw light all around. Mind is the lamp, and Virtue is the cleansing process.

3. GENEROSITY— The next quality

...that the Buddha advised Nakula's parents to cultivate is Generosity (*Cāga*).

The Pāli word *cāga* means “giving up”, renunciation, generosity, munificence.

Cāga, with *saddhā*, *sīla* and *paññā* (wisdom) form the four blessings (*Sampadā*) or accomplishments, pregnant with promise of early deliverance from all ill. And these same four—*saddhā*, *sīla*, *cāga* and *paññā*—are characteristic of the *kalyāṇa mita*, the beneficent friend who will aid one to attain all good. The Teacher tells us [8] that “he who has *sīla* and *saddhā* excels all stingy people in generosity (*cāga*).”

The world thinks that treasure is acquired by hoarding and accumulating. The Buddhist ideal is just the opposite, and “*cāga paribhāvita citta*, a heart bent on

giving”, is one of the Seven Noble Treasures (*satta ariya dhana*).

Saddhā and Sīla are two others of these “Seven Noble Treasures”, and Paññā (wisdom), which we have yet to consider, is another.

Beings burn with the fires of greed, hatred and ignorance. It is only with the extinguishing (*nibbuto*) of these fires, through not feeding them (*aggi anāhāro*), that it is possible to achieve the bliss of Nibbāna.

Note how, again, it is those five insatiable senses that cause all this world’s woe. It is through the sateless greed of these five that even hatred springs up and all earth’s quarrels, wars and endless strife. In the Mahā Nidāna Suttanta, [9] the Awakened One tells us how this comes to pass:

“Thus it is, Ānanda, that through sensations (*vedanā*) comes craving (*taṇhā*) ; through craving, comes chasing after (*pariyesanā*) ; through chasing after, comes acquisition of possessions (*lābha*) ; through acquisition, comes deciding what to do with these gains (*vinicchaya*) ; because of decision, comes the excitement of desire (*chandarāga*) ; because of the excitement of desire, comes cleaving to these possessions (*ajjhosāna*), because of cleaving, comes enclosing with boundary walls and fences (*pariggaha*) ; because of enclosing, comes miserly avarice

(*macchhariya*) ; because of avarice comes a need for keeping watch and ward over possessions (*āraakkha*) ; and because of this watch and ward, there come to be the laying hold of cudgel and weapon, blows, wounds, dispute, disunion, strife and quarrel, slander, lies and many another unskilful things.”

Again the Master says: “Ānanda, were there no craving of any sort or kind whatsoever, by anyone, for anything—that is to say, no craving for sights, sounds, odours, tastes, contacts, or ideas—then, there being no craving whatsoever, would there, with such cessation of craving, be any appearance of clinging?”

“There would not, Bhante.”

“And sensations cause craving. Ānanda, were there no sensations of any sort whatsoever, in anyone, for anything,—that is to say, no sensations born of stimuli received by way of sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch and imagination—then, there being no sensation whatsoever, would there, with such cessation of sensation, be any appearance of craving?”

“There would not, Bhante.”

“Wherefore, Ānanda, just that is the origin, the cause of craving, to wit, sensation.”

So one has to be ever watchful with these same clamouring senses, and when we experience their

insistent calls, take care that craving greed does not arise from them. Such right mindfulness is the key to the whole course of Buddhist meditation, and ultimately opens the door to Nibbāna.

Cāga— generosity and giving up—opposes the thoughts of greed. Each one of us must learn to cultivate this “heart bent on giving”. We must learn to give, to give promptly, before that ancient greed’s after-thoughts rush in to prevent meritorious actions, whenever the urge arises. The urge arises in one’s heart mainly from two kinds of beautiful thoughts—thoughts of compassion (*karuṇā*), and thoughts of reverential offering (*pūjā*). Thus arises all true greedless volition (*alobha cetanā*). He who gives a little with the aim of gaining much, in this very journeying of life, is only a practiser of usury. His heart is bent on accumulating, not on giving up.

Compassion prompts when we see a poor man in urgent need. Thoughts of reverential offering (*pūjā*) prompt when we see the greatly wise, the virtuous, the other-worldly and holy. The much misunderstood Buddhist practice of reverentially offering food-pūjā before the master’s image is of the latter kind. The image does not eat food. The Exalted One himself has “gone Beyond” and needs food no more. Yet, were he here, how greatly would we like to offer him such humble pūjā and because He has “gone beyond”, our

heart's urge prompts us to reverentially make such offerings before his image. It is a pure and greedless volition, and highly meritorious.

The hospitality of people in Buddhist lands is well known. In some lands folk may say—"There's a foreigner, heave a brick at him"—but not thus does the Buddhist treat a stranger—even after the strain of long years of exploitation and disappointment.

So long as he has aught to give, the Buddhist gives with an open hand. *Mitampacayā*, a 'measuring cook', one who measures just enough of the rice he cooks for guests, is the old Sinhala term of obloquy for a niggardly person. Greatness of heart in giving, and greatness of heart in accepting a gift—these are things illustrated again and again in our books.

Once the Peerless One was going on his round for alms, and a slave-girl offered him all she had—plain poor cakes made of waste rice powder. She thought, "Alas! It is all I had. Will the Lord deign to eat such coarse food, he who so often is served by *Mahārājās* and *Seṭṭhīs*?" And the Buddha, seating himself by the roadside there, ate those cakes, in her presence and to her unutterable joy.

Once, the noble Arahant *Mahā Kassapa*, on his alms-round, stood before a forlorn leper.

"Will he really accept food from such as I?",

wondered the leper, who, yet wondering, gave of the food in his own begging bowl. As he emptied the poor food into the Great Thera's bowl, a leprous finger, that had rotted to near self-amputation, dropped with the food into the Thera's bowl. "Woe is me!" thought the leper, "now he will never partake of this food!" But the mighty-hearted Arahant, carefully placing that foetid finger on one side, there and then serenely ate that tainted food.

Such are the marks of real culture. Mankind today is prating much of a "new world order". Can there be a "new order" in hearts that yet nurture the old, old poisons of greed, hate and ignorance? The only "new order" possible is for mankind to open its eyes to actuality, to see the truth of the Buddha-revelation and, adopting it, bring about that revolutionary change of heart that once made the glory of Dhammāsoka reign so great that its echoes still resound in world-history.

4 The last noble quality, mentioned by the Master to Nakula's parents, was the cultivation of WISDOM (*Paññā*). And, with *paññā*, we ordinary average folk find that we gradually leave the simpler side of Buddhist doctrine and go towards the abstruse.

Yet, even here, there is much that, even to the less fortunate Buddhists of today, is clear and

straightforward.

The Buddhist has no impossible postulates; he tries to see, as his teacher taught, “things as they really are”. He looks at the world around him and sees that all, all is transitory there. He sees that what is transitory is bound to be sad. All that we love is passing away, and such parting from the loved is suffering. And we, we too are part of the passing show—with greying hair, falling and decaying teeth, disease and death looming ahead—it is all sad. The Buddhist sees that, to what is transient and sad, one clings in vain, and in all this we can see naught of which he can say—with assurance as to the permanent value of such statement—“This is me, this is mine, this is a soul.”

Right here, one must pause to say that too many people in this world think that the world about them really is what they wish it to be; that happiness is round the corner, even if it is not too evident in the immediate environment. Thought is too undisciplined and vague. We refuse to pursue a train of thought that seems to lead to unpleasant conclusions, or even unfamiliar conclusions—like the woman who, seeing a giraffe for the first time in her life, exclaimed, “I refuse to believe it!” We allow old usage, vested worldly interests and immediate convenience to dominate our freedom of thought. We shrink from facing facts—and

yet, this is precisely what we must inflexibly do. The Buddha reveals facts. To him there were no theories. He, the “Teacher of Gods and men”, knew.

In the Saṃyutta Nikāya [10] we are told how, long years after the meeting already related, the aged Nakulapitā visits the Buddha once again. No mention is made of Nakulamātā who, perhaps has died.

“The fairest things have fleetest end, Their scent survives their close: But the rose’s scent is bitterness To him that loved the rose”.

The old gentleman is broken-down, sick and ailing. He feels lonely and complains that rarely does he see the Exalted One:

“Let the Exalted One cheer and comfort me”, he mourns, “so that it may be a profit and a blessing to me for many a long day.”

To him the Lord gently replied:

“True true is it, gahapati; disease-harassed is the body, weak and encumbered. For one, householder, hauling this body about; to acknowledge even a moment’s health,—what is this but folly?

Therefore thus, say I should thou train thyself:

‘Sick of body though I be, mind shall be healthy’,— thus should thou train thyself.’

That was all. And Nakulapitā, feeling that he had been “sprinkled with nectar,” gladly welcomed these words and, rising, saluted the Exalted One and departed.

How then is one to cultivate this “healthy mind” that remains serene in spite of all? The Buddha teaches us how.

He teaches us how to sow, so that we may reap happily. Though the Highest is not immediately open to everyone, the directions are clear. The Buddha wants us to see clearly, to see things as they really are—not as we imagine or wish them to be. He tells us to objectify even ourselves—this body, these senses, all experiences, and even mind itself.

Close investigation on these lines alone can reveal the truth that nothing cosmic lasts, that nothing cosmic affords true happiness, that nothing cosmic has an unchanging core, a soul.

Then, at long last, one SEES—one sees the worthlessness, the filth and horror of the cosmic. One flings it away and, in the very flinging—at that instant—one intuits the HYPERCOSMIC, the permanent, the truly happy.

And that is what is termed “Nibbāna”—the goal.

Notes

1. Majjhima Nikāya, 26. [\[Back\]](#)
2. *The Light of Asia*. Edwin Arnold. [\[Back\]](#)
3. Catukka Nipāta, Vagga VI, Sutta 5. [\[Back\]](#)
4. Saṃyutta Nkāya, Kosala Vagga. [\[Back\]](#)
5. Ariyapariyesana Sutta. Majjhima Nikāya. [\[Back\]](#)
6. Mahāparinibbāna sutta. Dīgha Nikāya. [\[Back\]](#)
7. Alagaddupama Sutta, Majjima Nikāya XXII. [\[Back\]](#)
8. Aṅguttara Nikāya. III. 34. [\[Back\]](#)
9. Dīgha Nikāya. [\[Back\]](#)
10. Khanda Saṃyutta: Nakulapitu Vagga I. [\[Back\]](#)

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